ALAMEDA HISTORICAL MONUMENT
CASE REPORT

BRUTON HOUSE

1240 St. Charles Street
Alameda, CA

Prepared for:

Historical Advisory Board
City of Alameda

Property Owner:

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I. Introduction

This case report evaluates the significance of the residential property at 1240 St. Charles Street ("Bruton House") for potential designation as an Alameda Historical Monument. Documentation includes a description of the property, an historical overview of the Gold Coast setting, a site history of the property, an assessment of significance, sources, and graphic attachments. The report was prepared by historian Woodruff Minor for property owner Jeannie Graham. Thanks are due to Nicole Dang, for her design assistance; to Carrolyn Kubota, for the photographs of the Cirque Room; and to Valerie Turpen, for providing census data and articles from the *Oakland Tribune* and *San Francisco Call*. The report was digitally submitted to the Historical Advisory Board in October 2011.

Summary of Findings

A large Colonial Revival residence with Queen Anne elements, 1240 St. Charles Street was designed and built by Denis Straub & Son, an Alameda firm whose junior partner, Fred P. Fischer, served as architect. Erected in 1897 for San Francisco businessman Daniel Bruton and his wife, Helen—whose daughters, Margaret, Esther, and Helen, became noted California artists—the house remained in the family through World War II. It appears to be eligible for designation as an Alameda Historical Monument, both for its architectural significance, exemplifying a style, and for its historical significance, notably its association with persons important in the artistic history of California.

Since integrity, or intactness, is a critical factor in evaluating the significance of historic structures, the report includes detailed descriptions of alterations and additions made to the Bruton House. The current owner has undertaken substantial upgrades over the past decade, including new landscaping and new elements added to the house, e.g., a front stairwell addition, a rear porch addition, and new ornamental trim. These alterations are of such quality and subtlety that they are difficult to detect and do not seriously detract from the original, historic character of the house. It is the opinion of the evaluator that the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for local landmark designation.

II. Description

The Bruton House is a spacious Colonial Revival residence on a large lot in the Gold Coast neighborhood. It ranks among the largest houses in the city, enclosing over 4,000 square feet of living space on four levels. The parcel, covering 12,750 square feet, with a frontage of 85 feet and a depth of 150 feet, is likewise among the city's largest residential lots. Together, the impeccably maintained house and professionally landscaped grounds comprise one of Alameda's notable residential properties. (Figures 1-3.)

Setting and Landscaping

The house faces west on a mid-block lot on the southernmost block of St. Charles Street, which terminates on the old southern shore. The 30 houses on the block (15 per side) were built between 1897 and 1960, exhibiting a mix of Colonial Revival, Craftsman (Arts

and Crafts), Period Revival, and Ranch styling. Most of the houses date from the first three decades of the 20th century; three predate 1900, including 1240 St. Charles, which is the oldest house on the block; and four postdate World War II. There are mature street trees and globe-top standards—rare remnants of the city's early 20th century street-lighting system (also found on Bay, Hawthorne, Caroline, and Weber Streets).

The house has a moderate setback from the street. The front yard is bordered by a flagstone retaining wall; steps at the south end of the wall provide access to a winding flagstone walkway leading to the house's entry and rear garden. Topiary shrubs extend along the front of the retaining wall; an elevated lawn extends behind the wall; and plantings of ornamental shrubs and trees are clustered around the yard. A flagstone driveway leads past modern wood gates in period styling to an open concrete parking area along the north side of the house. The modern walkway gate is similarly styled.

The deep backyard is dominated by a towering oak tree, one of the largest coastal live oaks in Alameda (estimated by arborists to be at least 150 years old). Ornamental shrubs and trees are set in sinuous planting beds around the garden's perimeter. The flagstone pathway meanders around a central lawn with circular fountain, leading to an oak-shaded patio. There are two wood-frame outbuildings: the former garage, at the northeast rear corner of the lot (now used for storage), and a former pool house on the south property line. The garage (1923; enlarged 1937) has a steeply pitched hip roof, walls clad in narrow wood siding, and new sliding wood doors in period styling. The gabled pool house (ca. 1940; moved to site 1964), which has similar siding, has been rebuilt by the current owner with new roof, rear wall, windows, door, kitchen, and bathroom.

House Exterior

The Bruton House is a large, wood-frame structure with concrete foundation, raised basement, two full stories, and attic story. It has a rectangular plan and voluminous boxy massing, with projecting bays and porches. The roof is a steeply pitched hip with subsidiary hips and large gabled dormers at the front, sides, and rear. Stylistically, the house is transitional between Queen Anne and Colonial Revival, though primarily in the latter style; more precisely, the design is Colonial Revival with Queen Anne elements. The boxy massing, hip roof, narrow siding, and classical detailing are signature elements of Colonial Revival. The asymmetrical façades, gabled dormers, multiple bays, varied windows, and wraparound entry porch with eclectic columns retain a Queen Anne feeling, as does the interior planning of the main floor. (Figures 2-3.)

The house's façade embodies these transitional qualities, combining the hipped form and classical detailing of Colonial Revival with a picturesque placement of elements more characteristic of Queen Anne, e.g., a large bowed bay on the lower left, an ornamental plaster panel on the upper right, and varied windows on several levels. The occurrence of stairwell windows on the façade is unusual—they are typically relegated to side elevations—contributing to a feeling of visual complexity and eccentricity that is mannerist in spirit. These mid-floor windows set up a visual play of diagonal bands crossing at an embellished stairwell window near the center of the façade.

Walls are clad in horizontal wood siding—wide siding at the base surmounted by narrow clapboard on the first and second stories. A water table demarcates the base; a smooth frieze band with ogee trim extends beneath the eaves. The entry is located on the house's south side (originally facing a vacant parcel with oak trees). A tall entry porch with rooftop balcony wraps around the house from side to rear; a matching but smaller porch addition projects back from the house's northeast rear corner. Porch ceilings are tongue and groove. Railings have square balusters and square posts with rounded caps. The tapered round porch columns have bulbous bases, flared capitals, and frieze bands—vaguely classical, eclectic designs on the cusp of Queen Anne and Colonial Revival.

The house has varied windows with both wood sash and leaded glass. Wood-sash windows include tall double-hung windows interspersed with smaller double-hung windows, and pairs of wide double-hung windows in the dormers. Side and rear bays incorporated large fixed-pane windows. A number of windows incorporate leaded glass. The most notable examples are the matched pair of lower stairwell windows at the house's southwest corner, by the entry, which have identical art-glass panels in an abstract floral/radiant design, mixing lavender, gold, yellow, and clear beveled glass. Larger upper-level stairwell windows (at the front and south side) combine clear and translucent beveled glass in identical abstract floral designs. Similar panels of beveled glass are found in two rear doors on the first floor and two balcony doors (with transoms) on the second floor. There is also a small façade window with a leaded diamond-pattern upper light. Most windows and doors have understated frames and sills trimmed with ogee molding. The entry, with massive paneled door and sidelights, is notable for its paneled surround; the door and sidelights are glazed with thick beveled glass.

The house retains original wood appliqué, including carved modillion brackets under the eaves and a dentil course on the cornice of the entry porch. Ornament is concentrated on the façade. A focal point is provided by the upper stairwell window, adorned with a bracketed sill, fluted Corinthian pilasters, and a hood with egg-and-dart molding. The bowed bay is capped with a cornice trimmed with dentils and a miniature balustrade with urn finials. The lower stairwell window has a bracketed sill with railing crest and a dentil-trimmed cornice wrapping around to the main porch cornice. A lunette panel is set into the gable of the dormer. Dentils, pilasters, egg-and-dart molding, urn finials, modillion brackets, and lunette panel are all classically derived elements. (Figures 6-7.)

House Interior

The house encloses approximately 4,200 square feet on four finished floors. The first and second floors retain much of their original feeling. The main floor contains an entry hall, two parlors, dining room, and remodeled kitchen; three bedrooms and two bathrooms (one remodeled, one new) comprise the second floor. The added basement-level rooms include a guest suite, exercise room, laundry room, utility room, and wine cellar. The former attic has been converted into a study/lounge, or "media room"—a vaulted space with wide dormers and balcony affording panoramic views. (Figures 10-14.)

The first floor features the most impressive historic spaces and finishes in the house. One enters a spacious hall with a staircase and wide portals opening onto two parlors. The main parlor, on axis with the entry, is currently used as the living room; the smaller parlor, now a sitting room, is to the right. Angled between these rooms is a doorway leading to the dining room at the rear, adjoined by a kitchen at the northeast rear corner. The larger parlor extends across the front of the house, enlarged by the bowed bay. The less formal smaller parlor, or den, with fireplace and built-in shelves, faces south to the entry porch through a wide, slant-sided bay. The dining room, linked to both parlors by wide portals, looks out to the rear garden through another wide, slant-sided bay. The wide portals retain pairs of five-panel pocket doors, and paneled rear doors in the kitchen and small parlor open onto the porches. All doors retain original bronzed hardware.

Oak flooring extends throughout the main floor except in the kitchen, enhanced in the entry hall and main parlor by parquet borders. Walls and high coved ceilings are finished in smooth plaster. Unpainted wood trim (redwood and oak) is uniformly stained a dark hue to provide visual unity. Woodwork includes baseboards, picture molding, and door and window surrounds with bull's-eye blocks. The most impressive concentration of wood detailing is the entry hall, with its formal staircase with high paneled base, paneled front door with paneled sidelights, and built-in wood bench. The sitting room features a paneled fireplace with beveled mirror and a built-in cabinet with lunette alcove, adorned with carved floral swags, dentils, and egg-and-dart and crown molding.

The staircase, with oak stairs and mahogany banister, winds up to the second floor in three flights separated by two landings. The plan of this floor consists of a wide central hallway flanked on the west (front) by a bathroom and a bedroom, and on the east (rear) by a master bedroom suite, with bathroom, and a guest bedroom. Floors are fir; ceilings lack coves. Woodwork is similar to the first floor, including baseboards, picture molding, door and window surrounds, and five-panel doors. The master bedroom, at the house's southeast rear corner, retains a small fireplace; the wood surround is adorned with carved floral motifs and a beveled mirror with egg-and-dart border. Doors in the master bedroom and guest bedroom open onto porch-top balconies.

Alterations

The property underwent relatively few changes prior to 2001. Under the Bruton family, 1897 to 1944, the only known modification was the addition of the extant garage, built in 1923 and enlarged in 1937. The Plant family, owners from 1944 to 1983, made several changes in the 1960s, including the 1964 addition of a swimming pool and pool house (the extant ca. 1940 pool house was moved to the site). The Plants made few changes to the house itself, remodeling the kitchen and bathroom in 1969. The Torres family, owners from 1983 to 1987, made no documented changes. Soon after acquiring the property in 1987, the Everett family made further alterations to the kitchen and bathroom, upgraded the foundation, and began a conversion of the attic into a master bedroom suite. They also stripped and refinished the interior woodwork (painted by a previous owner) and commissioned a major installation of Bradbury & Bradbury wallpaper.

The new owners in 1999, Bruce Gilliat and Jeannie Graham-Gilliat, began planning for major changes to the property in 2000, completing the work between 2001 and 2004. The project took in the site, landscaping, and house. The house was moved four feet forward and three feet south to accommodate an expanded rear garden and a new driveway to the north. The new concrete foundation had a deeper basement for new living spaces. The old brick and concrete foundation material was used to fill in the swimming pool, and new gardens were created at the rear, front, and sides of the house, including an elevated front lawn with retaining wall and a rear lawn on the site of the swimming pool.

After its relocation on the lot, the house received two major additions along its north side at the front and rear. As originally built, the house had an inset ell at its northwest (left) front corner. This space has been enclosed with a slightly recessed, two-story stairwell addition with two front windows and one side window. The front windows duplicate the façade's original upper stairwell window, with fluted pilasters and egg-and-dart trim. The rear addition consists of a new porch projecting off the kitchen, with rooftop balcony and upper-level bedroom extension. The additions are capped with new hip roofs and a new north-facing gabled dormer. In terms of design, materials, and detailing, the additions are seamlessly integrated with the original house. (Figures 2-5.)

Several other alterations were made to the exterior. Balcony railing was added to the roof of the entry porch, replacing the original low railing; the new railing is adorned with urn finials matching those on the façade. A small balcony with identical railing was added to the south dormer. Added plaster ornament includes wraparound egg-and-dart molding beneath the eaves and a cartouche in the front dormer lunette (matching the cartouche in the new north dormer). The brick chimney, on the rear roof slope, was rebuilt and clad in wood. Other changes had to do with replacing original elements in kind, such as new double panes in the windows. Most in-kind replacement dealt with deteriorated elements, e.g., remilling some of the wood siding, rebuilding the rear porch stairs, and replacing the plaster façade panel with a new plaster panel of similar design. (Figures 6-9.)

The principal alterations to the interior may be summarized as follows. New living spaces were added in the basement and attic, and all four levels were connected by new stairs in the stairwell addition. The main change to the first floor is the kitchen, remodeled several times since the 1960s as one large room with attached half-bath (eliminating the original pantry). The current owner added the tile flooring, central island, granite counters, cabinetry, wood molding, and "oak tree" décor. The second floor originally contained four bedrooms; now there are three. The middle rear bedroom was eliminated and the space incorporated into a new linen closet and an enlarged master bedroom with new walk-in closet; the original walk-in closet was rebuilt as the master bathroom. The guest bedroom was extended over the rear porch addition. The bathroom, remodeled by prior owners, was restyled by the current owner. (Figures 13-14.)

Other interior changes include the following. Lath and plaster was removed from studs for new wiring and seismic upgrades, and the walls rebuilt with sheetrock. Tongue-and-groove wood wainscot in the entry hall, stairwell, and second-floor hallway was replaced with taller pressed-cardboard wainscot in an embossed floral pattern, stained to simulate

leather and trimmed with wood molding. Rosettes and chandeliers were added throughout the house, and recessed ceiling lights were installed in the living room, dining room, and kitchen. Fireplaces were converted to gas, with rebuilt fireboxes and hearths. The house is "smart" with electronic systems, including intercom/radio speakers in every room, and flat-screen televisions are retractable or framed in period molding. As with the exterior, interior alterations harmonize with the house's historic character, including extensive wood trim milled to match the original woodwork.

Designers and craftsmen associated with the property's post-2000 modifications include Kathryn Mathewson, Secret Gardens, San Francisco, and Iris Watson, Thomsen's Garden Center, Alameda (landscaping); John Mulligan, Oakland (masonry); Bolinger Design Services, Hayward, and Buested Construction, Alameda (additions); Lorna Kollmeyer, San Francisco (plasterwork); Jerry Wilkins, Custom Kitchens, Oakland (cabinetry); and Si Lewis, Hidden Connections, Alameda (media installation). The current owner collaborated closely with these and other professionals on all phases of the project.

III. History

With the arrival of the railroads and associated ferries in the 1860s and 1870s, the locus of residential development in Alameda shifted from the East End to the broad central section of the town. New neighborhoods spread west from the commercial and civic center on Park Street, coalescing around commuter stations on the rail lines. The Gold Coast district, extending west from Grand Street, was the culmination of this westward trend, and its shoreline groves became the setting of the town's most prestigious neighborhood, known for its fine homes, tree-lined streets, and bayshore setting.

The Gold Coast

The "Gold Coast"—a name of relatively recent provenance, dating from the mid-20th century—comprises approximately 20 blocks clustered along the old southern shore. The area has porous borders, deriving its identity more from the quality of its houses, gardens, and streetscapes than any precisely delineated boundaries. The neighborhood extends some eight blocks west from the vicinity of Grand Street, along Dayton, Clinton, San Jose, and San Antonio Avenues. The principal cross-streets—Paru, Sherman, Bay, St. Charles, Caroline, and Weber—run south from Encinal and Central Avenues, ending at bulkheads and bluffs on the old bay shore. The original shoreline is now bordered by landlocked lagoons created as part of the 1950s South Shore bay-fill development.

The neighborhood is an amalgam of property subdivisions dating primarily from the late 19th century, including Oak Park (1876), Teutonia Park (1877), Encinal Park (1879), and Bay Side (1889). The first ripple of residential development passed through the area in the late 1870s and early 1880s, after commuter trains began running down Encinal and Central Avenues. Those early Gold Coast houses, which included half a dozen mansions on Grand Street and several others along the shoreline bluffs, set the tone for the area as an abode of prominent families in fine homes. The second wave of development extended from about 1890 to about 1910, with a final wave in the 1920s. A roster of Gold Coast

residents over the years would include business owners and executives, bankers, brokers, merchants, engineers, doctors, and attorneys. Many homeowners were businessmen who worked in San Francisco, commuting by train and ferry.

The extended second wave of development, at the turn of the 20th century, was the Gold Coast's "classic" phase—its period of peak construction—lending the district an architectural character derived from the prevalent styles of the era, i.e., Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Craftsman (Arts and Crafts). There are also numerous houses from the third wave, in revivalist styles such as Spanish Colonial Revival and the revived Colonial Revival, but they rarely coalesce into streetscapes as do houses of the second wave. Though mansions continued to go up in the Gold Coast, most houses of the second and third waves were mid-sized two-story residences. Houses from the first wave, few in number to begin with, have mostly been demolished or altered beyond recognition.

While the three phases of intensive development outlined above account for most of the Gold Coast's residential stock, a number of other houses went up in the years between and after the waves. Later houses were built on the sites of demolished mansions or on the subdivided grounds of existing properties. Many of these "infill" structures are in the modernist Ranch idiom, dating from the 1930s to the 1960s.

St. Charles Street

Prior to 1900, most houses in the Gold Coast were located east of Sherman Street. The center of development was the vicinity of present-day Franklin Park, within easy walking distance of the Morton Street train station. By contrast, much of the property west of Sherman Street was held in large parcels, delaying intensive development of the area until the early 20th century. St. Charles Street provides a microcosm of development trends in this section of the Gold Coast.

In 1877, the west side of St. Charles Street between Central Avenue and the southern shore was partitioned into large lots by the Teutonia Park and Homestead Association, a group of German investors based in San Francisco. (Figure 15.) Widespread at the time, homestead associations pooled the resources of their shareholders to acquire land "wholesale," doing away with real-estate middlemen. Teutonia's Gold Coast tract was a pristine oak grove ending at bluffs overlooking the bay. The three lots on the block south of San Antonio Avenue extended through to newly created Christina [Hawthorne] Street, with frontages ranging from 275 feet to 340 feet. The two southerly lots were owned by Jacob Remmel, a wine and liquor wholesaler who served as Teutonia's president. The family residence, built in 1879, and another residence of similar age on the north lot, were the first houses in the Gold Coast west of Sherman Street. Two of Remmel's sons would play memorable roles in local history—Julius as a partner in Marcuse & Remmel, Alameda's most prolific homebuilders of the 1890s, and Bert as an architect for the firm who went on to design many other houses in the city, notably in the Gold Coast.

Following Jacob's death in 1882, his widow sold most of their land—about a thousand feet of combined frontage on St. Charles and Hawthorne Streets, stretching south from

the family residence to the shoreline. The 1883 residence of attorney and investor Columbus Bartlett, who acquired 340 feet of frontage at the south end of St. Charles Street, was one of the first bayshore mansions in the Gold Coast. His partner in real estate, D. L. Randolph, lived in another new mansion on the adjacent parcel. By 1900, the west frontage of the 1200 block of St. Charles Street was still owned by four families in four homes from the 1870s and 1880s. By 1905, several new houses had been built on lots created from existing parcels. The four older houses were demolished and their sites developed with 11 new houses in the 1920s and 1930s, and two modern "infill" houses would be built on the west side of the block in 1958. (1217, 1237, and 1257 St. Charles Street mark the respective sites of the Bartlett, Randolph, and Remmel residences.)

The Strybing Tract

The east side of the block, long owned by investor C. H. Strybing, was subdivided in 1897 and fully developed by 1916. Born in Germany in 1821, Christian Heinrich Strybing came to San Francisco in 1849, at the height of the Gold Rush. He began a lucrative grocery business with his brother Henry, a New York commission merchant, helping pioneer the burgeoning coast-to-coast clipper ship trade. Henry shipped goods from the East Coast; Christian sent payments in California gold. C. H. Strybing died a rich man in 1895, leaving his wife, Helene, a fortune in cash and other assets (which she managed wisely: at the time of her death, in 1926, she left a sizable bequest for the creation of the Strybing Arboretum in Golden Gate Park).

Among the assets Mrs. Strybing inherited from her husband was a choice piece of property in Alameda's Gold Coast—an oak-studded tract covering nearly four acres. The land extended along the east side of St. Charles Street from Central Avenue to the bay, facing the Teutonia lots—two long blocks separated by San Antonio Avenue, totaling about 2,000 feet of prime frontage. Yet the tract was only 100 feet wide. Once part of the holdings of the Fitch family, Gold Coast land lying between Sherman and St. Charles Streets had been sold in the 1860s as five long, narrow strips; the blocks bounded by Bay Street and St. Charles Street took in three strips 100 feet wide. Russian-born Charles Baum, a San Francisco fur importer, owned the Bay Street frontage, which passed to his heirs in 1888. The Strybing and Baum properties were separated by a strip at the center of the blocks, owned by a German investor named Haussman. (Figure 15.)

Once her late husband's estate was settled, Mrs. Strybing lost little time disposing of her Alameda land. "Some very fine residence property is now put upon the market," noted the *Alameda Daily Argus* in March 1896. "There are so few tracts left in localities so desirable—especially whole frontages that are not yet broken in upon by squalid or indifferent improvements—that this opportunity is a rare one, indeed." The south Strybing block was subdivided and sold over the following year, and deeds to nine new parcels on the block were recorded in March 1897 (the north block sold six months later). San Francisco bankers and businessmen comprised seven of the eight new landowners; most were investors who later partitioned their parcels into lots for buyers seeking home-sites. The sale of the Strybing property was handled by attorney Alexander Baum, one of Charles Baum's sons, who resided on the family tract on Bay Street.

By World War I, the tract south of San Antonio Avenue was built out. Fifteen houses went up during those years, most of them by 1910 (the last two were built in 1913 and 1916). The first three houses were commissioned by San Francisco businessmen who counted among the eight original purchasers of the land—tobacco merchant Daniel Bruton (1240 St. Charles, 1897); insurance agent Frederick W. Voogt (1200 St. Charles, 1898); and banker Fred W. Ray (1244 St. Charles, 1899). Other early homeowners included shipbuilder Walter G. Tibbitts (1246 St. Charles, 1899); civil engineer John B. Wallace (1260 St. Charles, 1901); lumberman James E. Higgins (1242 St. Charles, 1904); Dr. George C. Thompson, longtime principal of Alameda High School (1232 St. Charles, 1910); and mining executive George A. Kendrick (1208 St. Charles, 1916).

The first stylistic wave in the tract, from 1897 to 1904, was Colonial Revival—the style of the Bruton, Voogt, Ward, Tibbitts, and Higgins residences. Those designs ranged from the vestigial Queen Anne feeling of the Bruton House to the more formal classicism of the Voogt House and Higgins House. Five dwellings built between 1901 and 1910 exhibit the more rustic styling of the Craftsman, or Arts and Crafts, style. Five others, dating from 1904 to 1916, are composite designs mixing Colonial Revival and Craftsman motifs. One modernist Ranch house, at 1246 St. Charles Street, occupies the site of the Tibbitts residence, which burned in 1960.

A number of Bay Area architects, many of them prominent in their day, contributed to the creation of this fine Colonial Revival/Craftsman streetscape. Henry H. Meyers (Ray House, 1899) and Bert E. Remmel (Voogt House, 1898; Tibbitts House, 1899; Smith House, 1904) were Alameda residents with offices in San Francisco. William Mooser II (Curtis House, 1904) also worked out of San Francisco. A. W. Smith (Wallace House, 1901), Walter J. Matthews (Higgins House, 1904), and A. Dodge Coplin (Wilson House, 1905) were based in Oakland. William C. Hays (Thompson House, 1910; Ashley House, 1913) was a Berkeley resident who taught at the UC School of Architecture. Fred P. Fischer, architect of the 1897 Bruton House, was a local designer-builder.

A curious footnote concerns the 100-foot-wide strip of land that once ran down the middle of the block, curtailing the depth (and delaying the sale) of the frontage tracts. "The Strybing property is a strip having but one hundred feet of depth," the *Argus* had noted in March 1896, a full year before the land was sold. "The danger is that this may be purchased promiscuously and covered with little cottages and shanties because of its shallowness. The strip behind it is owned by a man who resides in Hamburg and who seems not to be desirous of selling." By 1901 the strip had been sold, divided between the Baum family and property owners on St. Charles Street—giving most parcels 150-ft. depths. Before the Baums subdivided their own tract, beginning around 1907, a few homeowners on St. Charles Street acquired additional land, resulting in 200-ft. depths. One property owner at the south end of St. Charles Street retained part of the central strip as a vacant parcel. After World War II, Frank Weeden, who lived at 1236 St. Charles, and several neighbors developed a portion of this parcel with a pool where he gave free swimming lessons to children. The pool is still owned by adjoining property owners.

The Bruton House

The first house in the Strybing tract, the 1897 Bruton residence, approached the scale of the Bartlett and Randolph mansions across the street. Construction started in the spring, soon after the land was purchased, and was brought to completion in about six months. In September, when the *Argus* ran a story about the sale of the north Strybing block, the article noted that on the south block "one fine house is about completed opposite the residence of D. L. Randolph, by Daniel Bruton." The family moved in two months later.

This "fine house" was designed and built by the long-established Alameda firm of D. Straub & Son—the partnership of pioneer contractor Denis Straub (1822-1899) and his stepson Fred P. Fischer. Theirs was the oldest homebuilding firm in the city. Born in Germany, Straub had settled in Alameda in the 1860s, taking on Fischer as partner in the 1880s. The firm's crews erected dozens of houses in the town, many of them designed by Fischer, a versatile designer-builder who apprenticed under his stepfather. "Messrs. Straub & Son are noted for the excellence of their work," opined the *Argus,* in an 1894 article about the firm. "Alameda is a much different place today than what it was when they commenced putting up houses. They have seen it expand from a straggling village to a beautiful city, and in all parts of the city are dwellings erected by them." The Bruton House, one of their final commissions, is among their most impressive achievements as designer-builders in Alameda.

The Bruton residence presaged the development of the Strybing tract as a streetscape of stylish and commodious dwellings. Few other houses in the tract were as large, however; only the 1904 Higgins residence, next door, was truly comparable in scale. The Brutons also owned the largest lot in the tract, totaling 200 feet of frontage; the house stood at the north edge of their parcel, the long veranda facing south to oak-shaded grounds. Most of this frontage would be sold as two lots, in 1910 and 1912, and developed with the 1910 Thompson House and the 1913 Ashley House, at 1232 and 1236 St. Charles Street. The Brutons were left with 85 feet of frontage—still one of the widest lots on the street.

The Bruton Family

Daniel and Helen Bruton formed part of the Irish exodus to America in the 19th century. Born around 1840, Daniel was one of 13 children of a Dublin merchant who supported Irish independence. Suffering business reversals due to his political views, Daniel's father brought the family to the United States in 1849, settling in Brooklyn, New York. Daniel and his older brother Thomas went to work as salesmen for various tobacco companies. They moved to San Francisco in 1879, where they continued to represent eastern tobacco firms such as Marburg Bros. of Baltimore. Though Thomas later switched careers to journalism, working for a San Francisco-based business journal, Daniel remained associated with the tobacco industry until his retirement around 1903. The final years of his career were spent as the Pacific Coast agent of the American Tobacco Company, a giant corporation that absorbed Marburg Bros. in 1891.

Daniel Bruton first became a resident of Alameda in the mid-1880s, living with Thomas and other members of his extended family in a handsome Stick-style residence at 1630 Lincoln Avenue, next to the Grand Street train station (the house still stands). Daniel married around 1892, when he was over 50. His young wife, Helen Bell, was also Irish, born in Belfast and raised in Brooklyn. They had three children, Margaret, Esther, and Helen, all born in the 1890s. When they took up residence in the Gold Coast, the *Argus* duly noted the occasion in its "Personals" column (November 17, 1897): "Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Bruton of Railroad [Lincoln] Avenue have moved into their new house near the foot of St. Charles Street." At the time of the move, the growing family included one-year-old and three-year-old daughters. Daniel was nearly 60, approaching retirement. Helen, not yet 30, was pregnant with their third child, born three months later.

The Brutons lived comfortably and traveled extensively, leaving their Gold Coast home unoccupied for months at a time. "Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Bruton and family will spend the summer in the eastern states," reported the *Oakland Tribune* in April 1907. "They will leave for New York next month. They will return to their Alameda home on St. Charles Street in the fall. For the past year they have been at Pacific Grove but will return to their residence here after the eastern trip." In July 1908, the same newspaper noted, "The Brutons are occupying their house after an absence of about two years." The family also hosted convivial gatherings at "Woodworths," their country estate near the town of St. Helena, in the Napa Valley. Like other prosperous families of the era, the Brutons had a live-in maid—listed in the 1910 census as Lena Stagnaro, the 23-year-old daughter of an Italian immigrant.

The Bruton Sisters

Largely forgotten today, the three Bruton sisters—Margaret (1894-1983), Esther (1896-1992), and Helen (1898-1985)—were celebrated California artists of the 1920s and 1930s. (Figure 16.) Though Margaret was born in New York (her mother wanted to be with her family when she delivered her first child), Esther and Helen were born in Alameda, and the sisters were raised in the Island City. Growing up in the big house on St. Charles Street, the girls often painted and sketched together, sharing a dream of one day becoming artists. They received the enthusiastic support of their young mother, but their pragmatic father opposed the idea—due in part to the memory of his youngest brother, a struggling commercial artist and lithographer who died at an early age.

Margaret, the most precocious of the three, won her first award when she was 12, becoming the first as well to receive formal training—initially at the Mark Hopkins School of Design (later known as the San Francisco Institute of Art), then at the Art Students League, a prestigious New York art school she attended under a scholarship awarded to her when she was 19. The *San Francisco Call* (August 31, 1913) made note of her achievement: "Miss Margaret Bruton, who earned the scholarship from the Art Students League of New York, and who will depart for the great art center Monday, accompanied by her mother, Mrs. Daniel Bruton, entertained yesterday afternoon at a farewell affair at her home." Esther and Helen would emulate their big sister, enrolling at the Art Students League toward the end of World War I.

The sisters all moved back to Alameda by the early 1920s, shortly before the death of their father (then in his eighties). For the first time the young women felt totally free to pursue their art, indulged by their mother. In 1924, while Esther was living in a grass hut in Tahiti—her Gauguin experience—the family built a Spanish-style house and studio in Monterey, where Margaret had gone to study under open-air artist Armin Hansen. This became their primary residence in the 1920s, leaving the Alameda house unoccupied (or rented) for extended periods. In 1925, when the family toured Europe, the sisters stayed on in Paris for further studies at an art academy. Other trips over the following decade, including sojourns in New Mexico, Nevada, and Mexico, provided new subjects for their art. Along the way, they developed strong, independent personalities. "All three are stimulating, almost disconcerting…endowed with quick wit and abrupt response," noted a critic in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1929. Wrote another, in 1932: "The Brutons three are modern in their viewpoint on art, and these three tawny-headed women of Celtic background have a wit, sparkle and zest for life and work, enough for a half dozen."

Known primarily as a painter of oils and watercolors, Margaret Bruton won numerous prizes for her work, which included landscapes, still lifes, and portraits. (Figure 17.) Esther Bruton was more eclectic—in addition to paintings and etchings, she created tables with terrazzo tops and pictorial wood screens in gold and silver leaf—ultimately making her name as a muralist. One of her best-known works was the set of circus-theme murals she painted in 1935 for the Cirque Room lounge at the Fairmont Hotel (which named a cocktail in her honor). (Figures 18-19.) Esther also worked as a commercial artist and illustrator, including seven years with the I. Magnin department store. Helen Bruton specialized in wood-block prints and mosaics. Her first large project consisted of 22 glazed-tile mosaic murals in the Mudd Memorial Library at USC, commissioned by terra-cotta manufacturer Gladding, McBean. In the 1930s, she undertook various projects for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and related agencies—mosaic murals at the Fleishhacker Zoo in San Francisco, a mosaic mural at the UC Berkeley Art Gallery, and terra-cotta reliefs for a post office in Fresno. The sisters collaborated on their biggest mural, "The Peacemakers," a monumental bas relief panel created in 1939 for the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island.

Their names regularly appeared in reviews and articles in California newspapers and magazines of the prewar period. Critics often had high praise for their work, using phrases like "intelligence, order and clarity" and "excellence of craftsmanship," and pointing to a pervasive sense of vitality, warmth, and humor. A measure of their stature is conveyed in the preface to three monographs on the sisters published in 1937 by the Works Progress Administration: "Three artists, to whom we may look in expectation for advanced art forms and indigenous art of tomorrow, are Margaret, Esther and Helen Bruton. These talented women live with their mother in an old-fashioned house in Alameda, on the edge of San Francisco Bay. In their rambling attic studio, they valiantly experiment in new media and manners…Their creative energies are a part of the prestige now accorded women artists in California. They are dominant among western artists nationally recognized in art and publishing circles."

Beatrice Judd Ryan, writing about the sisters in the July 1932 issue of the *Women's City Club Magazine of San Francisco*, evoked life on St. Charles Street. "In the old family home in Alameda, a stone's throw from the water's edge, on a street canopied by English elms and chestnuts, the three Brutons, Margaret, Helen and Esther, are working at present on fresco, pottery and prints. [It is] an old-time home with a garden lying under the shade of oaks, where birds bathe in a basin, fashioned by Helen out of mosaics; an old-fashioned home, with a real wine cellar below, where Esther—well, she has designed amusing labels for home-brew—and an attic three flights up, now a studio, where Margaret has painted fresco on the plastered walls."

Margaret and Helen continued to live in Alameda with their mother until World War II, when they moved to Monterey. By then Esther had married. As Margaret explained, in a 1964 interview: "We stayed in Monterey for quite a number of years, but our home was still in Alameda and we went back and forth. During the war, in 1944, we came down here permanently and gave up our home in Alameda, and have been here ever since." Though the sisters would remain active in art circles, their careers waned in the postwar ascendency of Abstract Expressionism and other nonfigurative movements. Margaret died in Monterey in 1983, followed two years later by Helen, at the respective ages of 89 and 87. Esther passed away at her home in the Carmel Valley in 1992, when she was 96.

Later Owners

1240 St. Charles Street has had four owners since the Brutons. The first, in 1944, was a salesman named Felix J. Plant. An Alameda resident since the 1920s, Plant and his wife would live in the house for nearly 40 years (sharing it for part of that time with electrical engineer Bryant W. Fields and his wife). In 1983, the Plants sold the house to Benjamin and Teresa Torres, who moved across the street four years later. The new owners in 1987 were Skip Everett, who ran a flight school at Oakland Airport, and his wife, Nancy, a gynecologist. They raised four children in the house, subsequently renting it for a few years. One of their tenants was Oakland Raiders coach Michael White.

The current owner, Jeannie Graham, purchased the house in October 1999 with her husband, internet businessman Bruce Gilliat. The couple had met working in the telecommunications industry, and they had already restored one Victorian house in Alameda—an 1890 Queen Anne on San Jose Avenue, designed and built by Joseph A. Leonard—preparing them for their ambitious rehabilitation of 1240 St. Charles Street, which was completed in 2004. Ms. Graham, an active member of the Alameda Museum and the Alameda Architectural Preservation Society, and a patron of the annual Alameda Legacy and Holiday Home Tours, continues to make her home available for tours and events, placing it at the center of community life.

IV. Evaluation

The Bruton House appears to be eligible for listing as an Alameda Historical Monument for its architectural and historical significance. Despite the changes wrought by recent alterations and additions, the property retains to a high degree its original feeling and

historic character. The following evaluation, which is based on the documentation in the descriptive and historical sections, begins with general statements about the property's architectural and historical significance and concludes with a discussion of integrity.

Architectural Significance

The Bruton House is an excellent example of a Colonial Revival residence with vestigial Queen Anne styling, designed and built by a notable Alameda firm of the Victorian era. Significance is also derived from the scale of the house and lot, in both cases among the largest in Alameda. The oak tree in the rear yard, one of the largest and oldest specimens in the city, enhances the aura of the Gold Coast setting. In the citywide architectural survey conducted by the Planning Department in 1978-79, the house received the highest possible rating ("N"), indicating that it appeared to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, based on architectural quality alone. One of the evaluators in the survey, architectural historian John Beach, greatly admired the house's façade for its varied placement of windows and ornamental details.

Historical Significance

The Bruton House derives major historical significance from its association with Margaret, Esther, and Helen Bruton, important California artists of the prewar period. The sisters were not only raised in the house, they also spent much of their adult lives there during their most active period, using the attic as their studio. Few notable artists are associated with Alameda, enhancing the cultural significance of this particular property. Secondary historical significance is derived from the property's association with a prominent San Francisco businessman of the era, embodying historical patterns of development in the Gold Coast, while its association with an Irish family reflects broader cultural patterns of immigration and ethnicity in 19th century America.

Integrity

Landmark designation of the Bruton House hinges on the question of integrity. The house clearly possesses architectural and historical significance; but does it possess sufficient integrity to warrant landmark status? In the opinion of the evaluator, it does. The building has been modified, but its historic character remains largely intact, due to the quality of design and workmanship of the added features and the seamless integration of old and new elements. To cite the most evident change, the front stairwell addition, the massing, materials, and detailing are so expertly matched that it appears to be part of the original design. It is also set back slightly from the front plane of the house, allowing the original façade to stand more or less on its own, and the roof is integral with but subordinate to the original roof. Thus, despite its conspicuous placement at one end of the house's street façade, the addition is paradoxically unobtrusive. While this approach runs counter to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*—which state that "new additions should be designed in a manner that makes clear what is historic and what is new"—in this particular case the blending of old and new elements constitutes an effective architectural solution, enhancing functionality while preserving historic character.

Added ornamental features such as the egg-and-dart molding and dormer cartouche are understated and in keeping with the house's original character. The replacement of the plaster façade panel was an unfortunate necessity; the new panel, while not a duplicate, is in the spirit of the old. Other exterior alterations, such as the rear porch addition, the rebuilt chimney, and the south balcony addition, are not visible (or barely visible) from the street. As for the house being moved, its slight relocation on the lot has had minimal visual impact. Since residential interiors are less germane to landmark status, interior alterations are not assessed here, though they exhibit the same blending of old and new as exterior changes. In summary, the Bruton House retains sufficient integrity to convey in a meaningful way its architectural and historical significance, and as such appears to be eligible for designation as an Alameda Historical Monument.

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VI. Illustrations

Figure 1. Property location map. (Alameda County Assessor, 2011.)

Figure 2. Exterior view, front of house. (Photo: owner, 2004.)

Figure 3. Exterior view, rear of house. (Photo: owner, 2004.)

Figure 4. Exterior view, front of house. (Photo: owner 2005.)

Figure 5. Exterior view, front of house. (Drawing: Alameda Realty, 1999.)

Figure 6. Exterior view, façade detail. (Photo: author, 2011.)

Figure 7. Exterior view, façade detail. (Photo: author, 2011.)

Figure 8. Exterior view, façade detail. (Photo: author, 2011.)

Figure 9. Exterior view, façade detail. (Photo: author, 2011.)

Figure 10. Interior view, entry hall. (Photo: Buested Construction, 2004.)

Figure 11. Interior view from entry hall. (Photo: Michael Craig, 2005.)

Figure 12. Interior view, sitting room. (Photo: Michael Craig, 2005.)

Figure 13. Interior view, attic office/media room. (Photo: *Alameda Magazine*, 2005.)

Figure 14. Interior view, kitchen. (Photo: Buested Construction, 2004.)

Figure 15. Historical map. (Thompson & West, 1878.)

Figure 16. Bruton sisters portrait. (Photo: Imogen Cunningham, 1930.)

Figure 17. Margaret Bruton painting. (Image: Monterey Art Museum, 2011.)

Figure 18. Cirque Room, Fairmont Hotel. (Photo: Fairmont Hotel, ca. 1935.)

Figure 19. Cirque Room mural. (Photo: Carrolyn Kubota, 2011.)

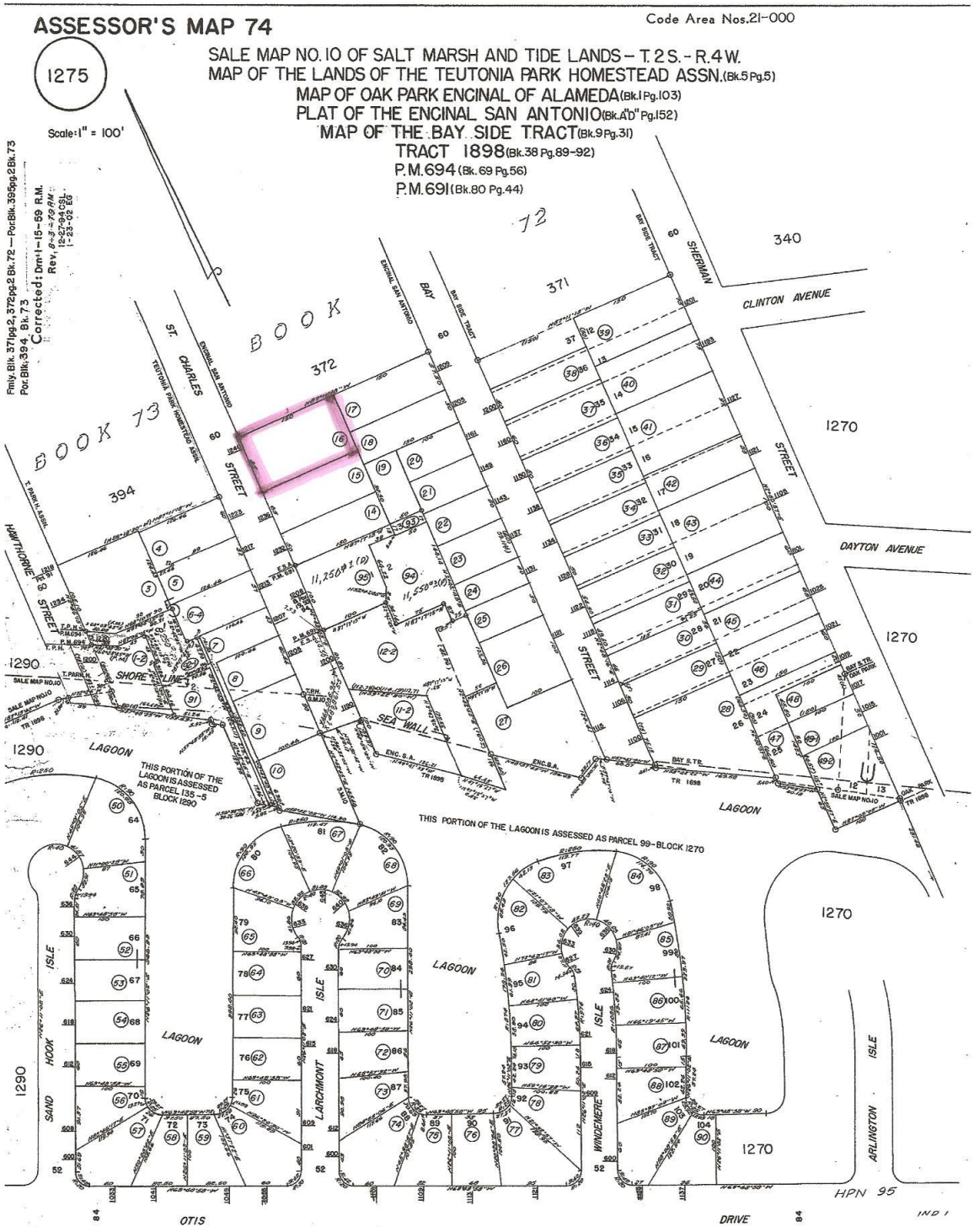
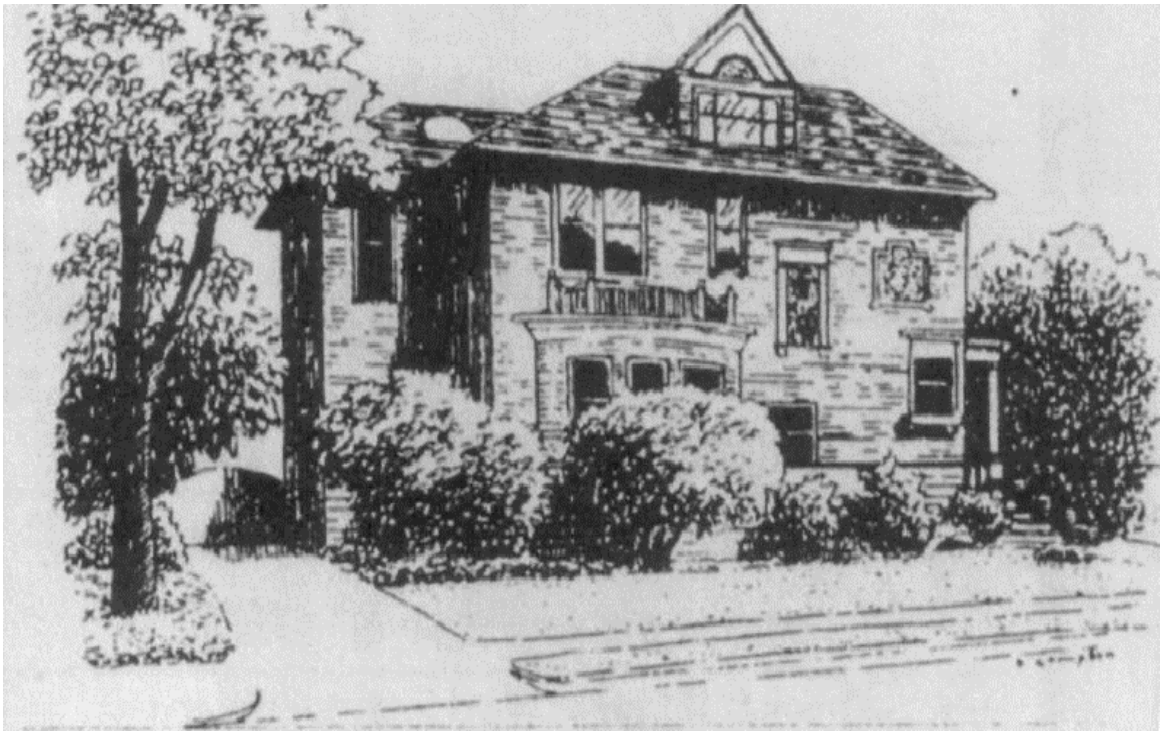


Figure 1. Property Location Map. (Alameda County Assessor's Map 74-1275.)

Figures 2-3. Front and rear views of 1240 St. Charles Street. In the top view, the front stairwell addition is on the left; in the bottom view, the rear porch addition is on the right. Built between 2001 and 2004, the additions harmonize with the original design. (Photos: owner, 2004.)



Figures 4-5. Two front views of 1240 St. Charles Street, showing the house before and after the stairwell addition. The drawing, from a 1999 real estate ad by Alameda Realty, shows the house's original façade with inset ell (left). The top view shows the house after the alterations of 2001-2004, with stairwell addition enclosing the ell. (Photo: owner, 2005.)

Figures 6-9. Ornamental details, Bruton House façade. The top left view shows the upper stairwell window with Corinthian pilasters; the bay-window cornice with dentils and urn finial; and the roof eave with modillion brackets. The plaster egg-and-dart course under the eave and the plaster cartouche in the dormer (also shown in close-up view, top right) were added by the current owner. The bottom views show the new ornamental plaster panel (left) and the deteriorated original which it replaced. The new plasterwork is by Lorna Kollmeyer. (Photos: author, 2011.)

Figure 10. View of entry hall, showing paneled staircase with mahogany banister and art-glass windows on lower landing. Note the built-in bench and oak floor with parquet border. The wainscot was added by the current owner. (Photo: Buested Construction, 2004.)

Figures 11-12. Two views of first floor. The top view looks from the entry hall toward the large parlor/ living room (left), dining room (center), and small parlor/sitting room (right). The rooms are connected by wide portals with pocket doors. The bottom view shows the sitting room, with fireplace and built-in shelves. Note the wide bay window (right) and porch door (left) with leaded and beveled glass pane. (Photos: Michael Craig, 2005.)

Figures 13-14. The office/ media room ("Sky Suite") in the converted attic, formerly the Bruton art studio, enjoys panoramic views of the Gold Coast. The kitchen's carved and painted "oak tree" motifs echo the giant live oak in the rear garden, framed by the bay window. (Photos: top, *Alameda Magazine*, 2005; bottom, Buested Construction, 2004.)

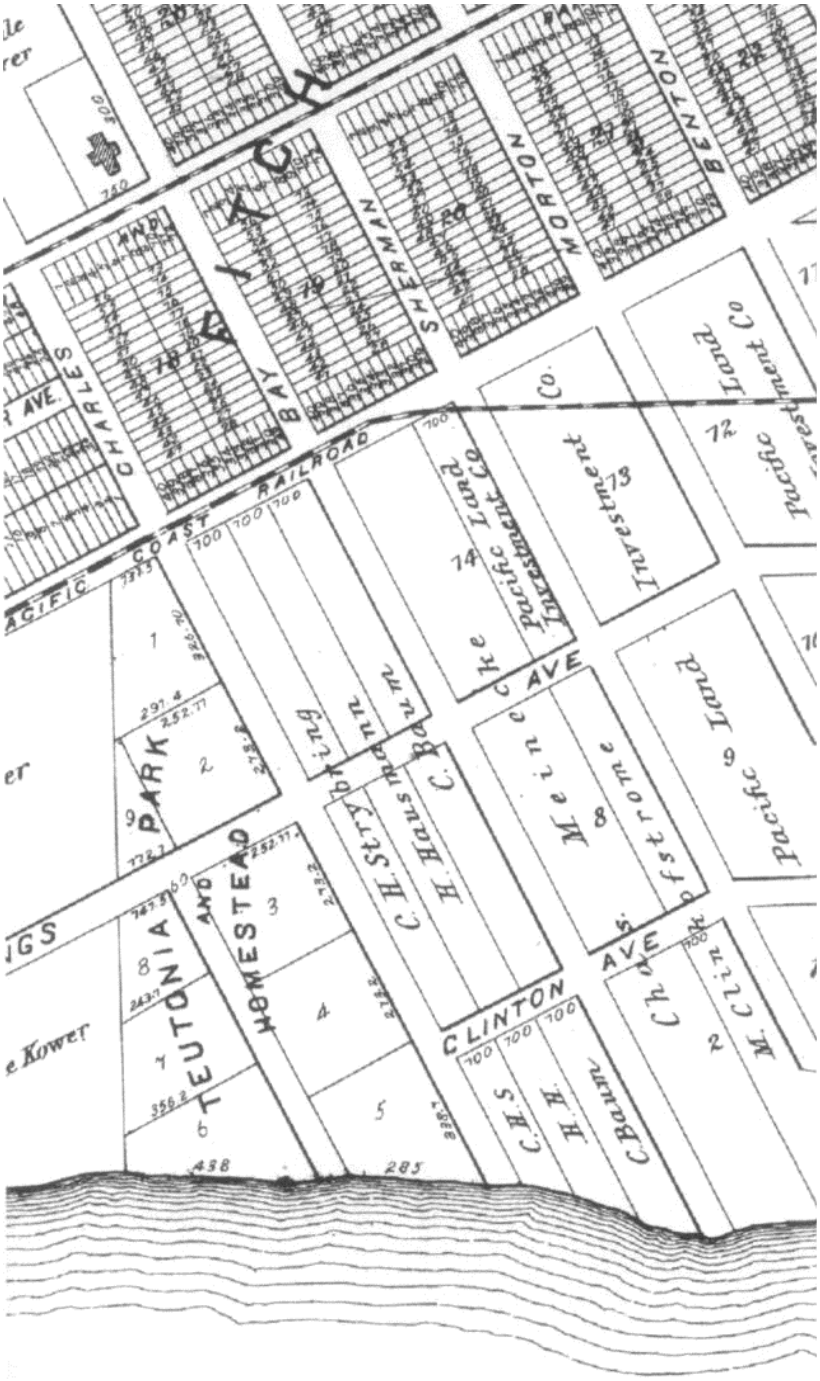


Figure 15. Parcel map showing west-central section of the Gold Coast, 1878. Long, narrow strips of land stretch from Central Avenue to the bay, between St. Charles and Sherman Streets. The parcel owned by C. H. Strybing, on the east side of St. Charles, was subdivided in 1897, twenty years after Teutonia Park on the west side of the street. Clinton Avenue, shown here extending through to St. Charles Street, was never actually opened west of Sherman Street. (*Official and Historical Atlas of Alameda County, California,* Thompson & West, 1878.)

Figures 16-17. Imogen Cunningham's 1930 photograph of the Bruton sisters—left to right, Helen, Margaret, and Esther—accompanied an article about them in the October 1940 issue of *California Arts & Architecture.* Margaret Bruton's *Barns on Cass Street* (oil on canvas, 1925) is in the collection of the Monterey Museum of Art, a gift of the artist in 1973 [see www.montereyart.com].

Figures 18-19. One of San Francisco's first post-Prohibition bars, the Cirque Room at the Fairmont Hotel was designed in 1935 by Timothy Pfleuger, with circus-theme murals by Esther Bruton. The historic photo depicts the Cirque Room soon after it opened; one of the room's many murals is shown in the contemporary view. Now used for events, the Cirque Room survives in original condition. (Photos: top, Fairmont Hotel, ca.1935; bottom, Carrolyn Kubota, 2011.)